DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 437 CS 510 516

AUTHOR	Colston, Nicole Marie
TITLE	Third Parties and Internet Campaigning: An Analysis of Cultural and Structural Barriers.
PUB DATE	2001-04-00
NOTE	27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association (71st, Lexington, KY, April 4-8, 2001).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Communication Research; Content Analysis; Credibility; *Internet; *Political Issues; *Political Parties; *Presidential Campaigns (United States)
IDENTIFIERS	Media Coverage; Political Communication; Rhetorical Strategies

ABSTRACT

The Internet presents a unique opportunity for third party candidates in presidential campaigns. The growing popularity of the Internet offers the potential for equal access despite unequal resources and limited media coverage. This study examined the "Vote Nader" Web site in its attempts to overcome traditional cultural and structural barriers through Internet campaigning. Four criteria for evaluating Web sites (format, language, multimedia, and links) provided the framework for the study. The ultimate result is a rhetorical analysis of the Green Party as they adapt their vision to fit current political realities and transcend traditional structural and cultural barriers to third parties. The analysis reveals the need for more interactivity, self-promoting language, and credibility through diverse sources. Contains 13 references. (Author/RS)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 450 437

Third Parties and Internet Campaigning:

An Analysis of Cultural and Structural Barriers

Nicole Marie Colston
Appalachian State University

ASU Box 15025
Boone, NC 28607

NC27655@appstate.edu

(828) 264-1670

Audiovisual needs: Internet access and projection

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

N. M. Colston

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CS 510 516

Abstract

The Internet presents a unique opportunity for third party candidates in presidential campaigns. The growing popularity of the Internet offers the potential for equal access despite unequal resources and limited media coverage. This study examines the *Vote Nader* website in its attempts to overcome traditional cultural and structural barriers through Internet campaigning. Four criteria for evaluating websites- format, language, multimedia, and links- provide the framework for that discussion. The ultimate result is a rhetorical analysis of the Green Party as they adapt their vision to fit current political realities and transcend traditional structural and cultural barriers to third parties. The analysis reveals the need for more interactivity, self-promoting language, and credibility through diverse sources.

Introduction

The 2000 Presidential elections lacked one feature of the previous two elections: a prominent third party candidate in the media. In 1992 and 1996, Ross Perot arguably made the most influential and successful third party mark in Presidential election history. It seems, however, that the American public and the broadcast media quickly forgot the exciting possibilities of third party challenges and success in American politics. The Green Party, with their presidential candidate Ralph Nader, presented the most successful challenge to the traditional two-party American political system in the 2000 elections.

The returning candidacy of Ralph Nader, combined with the international political prominence and activism of the Green Party, increased the potential for Green Party presidential election goal of 5 percent or more of the American popular vote. Many argued that the ability of the Green Party to gain government funding for the 2004 elections would have reshaped campaign finance and challenged two-party domination of the political arena. The Nader campaign managed to gain the most third party votes, but fell short of Green Party goals with only 3 percent of the popular vote.

With the exception of Ross Perot's candidacy, it is a reality that the mass media, particularly television broadcasting, severely neglects third party candidates in national election coverage. Thus, it seems the availability and communication of campaign platforms, candidate information, and political news of third party candidates is highly restricted to local, grassroots party supporters and the Internet.

The use of the Internet in political campaigning is a relatively new idea that can be directly attributed to the growth and increasing popularity of the World Wide Web. The Internet is a valuable resource and inexpensive tool used by all parties in reaching

voters on a national and even global level. Cost and ability are variables in the quality of websites in terms of graphics, sound, and interactivity. However, the Internet remains one of the only electronic communication resources with potentially equal accessibility to all political parties and presidential candidates.

The Green Party website which focuses directly on the 2000 Presidential Race is www.votenader.com. The *Green Party USA* website is also directed at the November elections. However, this site covers numerous other races, broad Green Party information, and affiliations. The links to most Presidential election information on this site take you to the *Vote Nader* website. This paper will analyze the *Vote Nader* website by focusing on the rhetorical strategies used by the Green Party to effectively overcome the traditional structural and cultural barriers to third parties. The paper will use four criteria to examine the framework and rhetoric of the *Vote Nader* website in overcoming these barriers.

The study will employ a critical method derived from research and theory in the fields of Internet communication and political science. The first level of the criticism involves four criteria outlined by Mitra- format, language, multimedia, and links. These criteria provide the framework for analyzing the website's content. The second level of the criticism is a focus on the rhetoric of the website. The focal point will be on the communication used by the Green Party to overcome the cultural and structural barriers to third parties outlined by Gillespie and Rosenstone et al (1996). The literature review section of this paper will address in more detail the method and rationale behind the study of political websites as venues for breaking structural and cultural barriers to third parties.

Literature Review

Third Party Politics in America

The current and historical discussion of third parties in American politics centers on the inherent structural and cultural barriers encounter by such parties. Gillespie identifies the political socialization in America as inherently disregarding ideological and class divisions. Two levels of this socialization prevent third parties from becoming viable political forces. The first level is the classification of deviations from the traditional two-party system as "un-American." The second level of this political socialization is the disposition of most voters. Gillespie argues that Americans are predisposed historically to have loyalty to the Republican or the Democrats or to the notion that one should vote for the person not the party. Younger generations never devote themselves to third parties because there are few existing supporters (Gillespie 1993). This conclusion could use further investigation in the light of more recent elections. Studies show that third party alliance relies on the existence of a non-prestigious third party contender, that is a contender that remains involved in the party even after election failures (Rosenstone et. al 1996). There are significant structural barriers to third parties as well. Among these are constitutional biases, ballot access restrictions, campaign resources, media coverage, and the co-opting and delegitimizing techniques of major parties (Rosenstone et al 1996).

Rosenstone identifies voting for a third party as an extraordinary act that consciously rejects the major parties. Bibby argues that voters are looking for a viable candidate more than an alternative third party. In addition, Isaacson identifies the American public's resistance to third parties and their acceptance of celebrity candidates

such as Jesse Ventura. The possibility of a successful personality candidate is higher than a third party candidate in face of the current media and the focus of personality politics in the electoral process (Issacson 2000). How do third parties gain votes then? To answer this question for the current elections we must look at the current American political culture.

A number of authors have addressed potential objectives for the success of a third party in the 2000 elections. These suggestions can be applied to the categorizations of structural and cultural barriers to create a multi-level criticism that incorporates traditional third party theory with modern political issues and environment. This analysis will focus on the structural and cultural barriers to current third parties in presidential elections. The traditional terminology of *structural barriers* will be applied to the need to mobilize voters, address campaign finance reform, create an anti-bureaucratic platform, and increase resource networks. The term *cultural barrier* broadly will encompass the need to address gender issues, class issues, transcend the liberal-conservative access, avoid negative campaigning, talk sense about money, and address social issues progressively.

Riessman suggests a number of main objectives that are key to a successful third party. He suggestions include differentiating from politics as usual, abandoning negative campaigning, anti-bureaucratic spirit, gender gap and age group considerations, value dimensions within themes, overarching themes, embracing the middle- and lower-class, transcending the liberal-conservative axis, and talking sense about money (Riessman 1994). Sanders adds to Riessman by arguing the necessity of raising class issues. Sanders also views the mobilization of voter turnout as key to third party success (Sanders 95).

Peterson maintains that ingrained in the political plight of third parties is the lack of a substantial network of people and resources (Peterson 1995). This argument provides an additional unit of analysis, as well as rationale for studying the third parties with Internet campaigns. The Internet potentially provides third parties the means to overcome some of the networking barriers. Judis confirms this assumption by declaring that the conditions for third party success have improved. The most prominent reasons for this improvement is the increase in new communications technology, growing voter alienation, and changing political opinions in light of Perot's success (Judis 1996).

Gillespie reminds us that the Perot campaign success relied heavily on material wealth. His argument is that future third parties with fewer resources cannot be judged on the same level. However, an equally viable argument is the assertion made by Judis that at some level political opinions concerning the viability of third party success have changed in light of Perot's success.

Literature on the Green Party specifically highlights the improvements needed in the Nader campaign. The Green Party fits under the category of a "new" political party. Such parties organize around an appeal to different issues. These issues are more often cultural than economic (Bibby 1998). Buell argues that an increased focus on cultural politics is necessary to improve the Green Party's success. Social issues such as race, gender, sexuality, and drugs need to be addressed realistically and progressively (Buell 2000).

The suggestions of these authors can be organized to provide a set of broad objectives for third party success in the upcoming election. The traditional terminology of structural barriers can be applied to the need to mobilize voters, address campaign

finance reform, create an anti-bureaucratic platform, and increase resource networks. The term cultural barrier broadly encompasses the need to address gender issues, class issues, transcend the liberal-conservative access, avoid negative campaigning, and address social issues progressively. In addition, the party vs. personality issue presented by Bibby and Isaacson adds the issue of candidate presentation to the discussion of cultural barriers.

Internet Campaigning

There is very little scholarly research written on the subject of websites in political communication and campaigning. Rheingold provides a powerful argument to the promises of "electronic democracy." He identifies an ability of the Internet to break out of the broadcast paradigm. Essentially, this suggests that candidates and parties can operate outside the manipulation, or neglect in this case, of the broadcast media. The implications of such a revolution on third party communication is the increased ability to campaign to a national audience and an equal playing field within the fast growing area of Internet communication. Benoit and Benoit highlight the escape from this paradigm as resulting in longer and more elaborate messages to voters.

William and Pamela Benoit provide a very informative overview of political websites in their article, "The Virtual Campaign: Presidential Primary Websites in Campaign 2000." Their discussion outlines the benefits of campaigning on the web, including the cost effectiveness, growing Internet audience, interactive capabilities, unfiltered nature, empowering capabilities, and quick response abilities. The uniqueness of the Internet as a means of political communication is that voters become "diverse

auditors to each tailor a rhetor's message to suit their own individual interests and concerns" (Benoit 1999). Mitra identifies this "seamlessness" as one of the limiting factors to Internet research, but also as one of the most unique aspects of the Internet. In essence, each reader's experience is "a product of the unique connections that a reader produces as he or she browses" (Mitra 1997).

This open access to information and participation opportunities is identified by Rheingold as one of the influential aspects of revitalizing democracy through the Internet. He argues that the revitalization of the public sphere is key to stopping the decline in democracy in this country (Rheingold 1993). Again, this has important implications for third party success. The revolution of society through Internet communication may create more opportunity for third party voice and success in American politics.

Analysis by Margolis, Resnick, and Tu of the 1996 primary campaign websites suggests differently, however. Their findings claim that major party websites outnumbered other party sites and were often more sophisticated. Reavy and Perlmutter remind us of the unequal access of technology in an economically and racially diverse society. In addition, a study conducted by the MIT Artificial Intelligence Laboratory suggests that the Internet can also be prone to "sound biting"- a repetitious overload of the same information. The conclusion is the loss of rational debate (Loeb and Mallery 1993). Furthermore, the study suggests through statistical data that the effectiveness of electronic campaigning may also rely on activity prompted by discussion in other media (Loeb and Mallery 1993). These studies suggest that there is a need for more research concerning the effectiveness of Internet campaigning.

Method

As the Internet increases in popularity, an analysis of the language of persuasion in Internet campaigning will provide a new insight to political communication and third party campaigning. Mitra's four criteria for evaluating websites- format, language, multimedia, and links- will provide the framework for that discussion.

Mitra's study on diasporic websites focuses on the discursive tension created by websites as they attempt to address a large global community and a small "ingroup" audience at the same time. Mitra argues that this discursive tension applies to all computer-mediated communication. Each website attempts to attract a certain audience as well as create a public face for itself. The discursive tension in addressing only one or both groups has social and cultural implications on group interactions. It becomes clear that, "there is now the possibility, and the need, to examine the phenomenon of the Internet and WWW in terms of its specific uses and opportunities, one of which is the way in which specific texts and discourse begin to address different fragments of the global audience" (Mitra 1997).

In Mitra's study, four criteria where found to be areas that can be manipulated by the authors to determine how the audience interprets the site. Mitra explains that the type of format, language, multimedia, and links used in the website can determine the targeted community. The *format* becomes the first cue of the targeted audience. Mitra points out that an ambiguous design can be created in an attempt to address both small in-groups and diverse global audiences. *Language* also plays a role in the inclusion/exclusion process by addressing certain members and marginalizing others who are not familiar with the language. The *multimedia* used on a site (images, sounds, and content)

determines how useful and attractive the site is to a potential audience. Content can be aimed at a specific group with a specific range of knowledge. In the same manner, images can be used to guide an unfamiliar user through the site or content. Mitra also identifies *links* as playing a role in the analysis of websites. As a site is used by more people the discursive tension increases. A variety of links can provide different choices for different audience members. In a sense, links can utilize the seamless nature of the Internet to reduce or maintain the textual anxiety created by the author through the format, language, and multimedia of the site.

As Mitra explains, the strategies used to address different groups on Internet websites can be applied to the larger study of the technological impacts of computer-mediated communication on our culture. It is the nature of political campaigning to focus on including potential voters and excluding other parties and views. Thus, the discussion of the *Vote Nader* website easily lends itself to analysis using Mitra's criteria. This criticism will utilize the criteria to analyze how the site was organized and potentially interpreted by the target audiences. The focus will be on strategies used to overcome the traditional structural and cultural barriers outlined in the previous section.

By following Mitra's technique, the evaluation of the third party website will remain open to the non-linear nature of the medium as a form of communication (Mitra 1997). In addition, the analysis will be applied to a "snapshot" of the website and its links in order to maintain consistency in evaluation despite site updates (Benoit 1999). The snapshot method is more appropriate because the study is less concerned with the "flux and consistency of the information" (Reavy and Perlmutter 1997) than the form and content of the information.

This criticism will focus on the format, links, multimedia, and language used in the *Vote Nader* site to analyze the attempts of the Green Party to break traditional barriers and change public perception and ideology.

The application of structural barrier analysis to the criticism will help in exploring the dialogue of the third party as it addresses the inequities of the American political system. The application of cultural barrier analysis will help in examining the rhetoric of the third party website as it attempts to present the ideological changes necessary for third party success.

The ultimate result will be a rhetorical analysis of the Green Party as they adapt their vision to fit current political realities and transcend traditional structural and cultural barriers to third parties. It is the intention of the author to create a politically and socially modern criterion that may be applied to current day third parties. A critical contribution will be made to the topic of political parties in Internet campaigning and the future success of third parties.

Analysis

Artifact Description and Preview

The opening page of the *Vote Nader* website has green borders and heading reading "Nader2000- Government of, by and for the people . . . not monied interests." Links on the site include titles such as the issues, newsroom, campaign events, donate, register to vote, email alerts, and biographies. There are larger buttons for RalphTV, shopping online for Green Party items, and rallies. The buttons are green with the

American flag outlined faintly in each. The opening page also has a picture of Nader next to a button reading "He does not accept soft money."

The Vote Nader website contains elements of the four criteria- multimedia, format, links, and language. The analysis will address each area separately while focusing on the implications to cultural and structural barriers.

Format

The title page, as described above, outlines very standard political issues. A few elements of the title page suggest the target audience and major themes of the website. First, the title quote "Nader2000- Government of, by and for the people . . . not monied interests" serves to immediately differentiate the Green Party and Ralph Nader from politics as usual. The quote implies two themes that are present throughout the text of the site. American politics has failed the people by allying with large corporations, and presidential candidate Ralph Nader recognizes this failure and pledges his support to help the American people revitalize Democracy. More themes established by the initial title page will be discussed in the language section. It is important to recognize the title page establishes the initial assumptions of the audience about the purpose of the website.

The most important element of the format of the website is the focus on volunteering and donations. The title page utilizes large buttons for donating and shopping online. In addition, the first titled section of the title page is "What You can Do Today." The site is formatted in a number of ways to network the resources and donations of potential supporters. The Green Party tries to overcome traditional structural barriers in resources and networking by placing focus on these areas.

A volunteering page outlines a number of potential ways to get involved. The page is outlined in a checklist form with headings and items aimed directly at overcoming the structural barriers to the Green Party. The audience is prompted to vocalize to the media their support of the Nader campaign and disappointment in limited coverage of third party candidates. The checklist also involves a pledge to register and vote. This checklist technique is aimed at overcoming the lack of media attention given to third parties in America and mobilizing voters and activism.

The goal of public awareness despite barriers is also addressed through a special section under volunteer opportunities that highlights ways to utilize the Internet. Supporters are encouraged to send e-mails to friends, put Nader banners on their websites, and act as online supporters. In addition, each page of the site offers the option to be emailed to another person. E-mail alerts to supporters and online availability scheduling further utilizes the Internet as a resource and networking tool. The home page is titled "Headquarters" suggesting that the audience is involved in the heart of a grassroots organization, in the center of the action. The Green Party's attention to the Internet as a method of information dissemination is a direct attempt to break the networking barriers that face third parties.

Another striking feature of the format of the Vote Nader website is the presentation of the issues. The website issues are divided into to main themes with sub-headings and campaign statements that define the different issues within the theme. Each statement is formatted to include links to related areas, letter and articles of supporters, and sometimes reports. The most important element is the tendency for almost all the essays to take a problem-solution format. Each essay begins by addressing the issue and

perceived problem. The essay ends with a declarative statement of the Green Party's solution. The solution language utilizes phrases such as we need, we should, the federal government should, and this calls for. While the language of these issues will play a large role in this analysis, the format suggests to the reader a level of depth and knowledge in addressing each issue. This format differentiates the Green Party stance from the statements of the major parties.

There are a few statements that neglect the problem-solution format discussed above. Nader and LaDuke format these issues using a series of quotes on the different dimensions of the topic. This formatting occurs under the topics of fair trade, labor, death penalty, and gun control. Familiarity with Ralph Nader suggests that these topics are ones of major concern and great knowledge. The quotes, formatted with dates and sources, show Nader's long support and consistent stance on these particular issues. This quote format can be paralleled intention the problem-solution format to appear knowledgeable and committed. In addition, the quote format provides a different type of issue discussion for a restless audience who may not want to read the numerous issue statements that make up the majority of the website. Essentially, the intention of the website is to provide a greater understanding to voters and differentiates itself from the statements of the two major parties.

The format of the site presents an opportunity to overcome structural barriers such as lack of networking and resources, lack of media attention, and lack of venue to present issues. In addition, the format provides a method to differentiate the Green Party from politics as usual.

Multimedia

Multimedia encompasses the images, sounds, icons, and textual content of the website. Themes in the language and format of the website are underscored through the use of multimedia images and text. The focus on volunteers and donations as discussed earlier is enhanced by the use of large graphics buttons. The opening slogan discussed above and the large pictures of Nader next to the soft money button are examples of multimedia that highlights and perpetuates the major themes of the website. The *Vote Nader* website has an image consistency between pages that enhances the navigability and understanding of these important topics. This consistency comes from the green buttons and the positioning of the slogan and main categories of the website at the top left corner of the site. The use of green differentiates the political website from others that use traditional red, white, and blue. The visual consistency of the website and the use of green throughout creates an inviting and organized visual feel. The navigability and attractiveness of the sight is necessary to the involvement of audience in the breaking the information barrier to third parties.

The largest impact of the multimedia on the *Vote Nader* website is the use of video. The site utilizes video to add in biographies of the candidates, presenting speeches, showing commercials, highlighting rallies, and highlighting endorsements. This type of publicity is inherently denied on real television stations. Instead, the campaign formed its own "Nader 2000 Press" to highlight the important events and recognize accomplishments. The archive resources reveal only a few sources of such information beyond this self-established press. C-SPAN is the only station with any significant contributions to the video collection. Video provides a means to see the

candidate personally; an opportunity denied the American public by most media. Furthermore, video highlights the endorsements made by celebrities and the events of the super rallies. Celebrity endorsements increase the potential news value of an event to a television-oriented society. Video, whether in news or entertainment form, is used to overcome structural barriers created by the media neglect by creating a venue for exposure of candidates and issues.

The focus on multimedia techniques like video on the website can be paralleled to the highly textual oriented issue sections. Video is used to appeal to the voter who is TV oriented or prefers not to read long statements. The video provides an alternative method of attracting a diverse group of voters. In a sense, video also provides a venue for personality politics in the Green Party. The audience gets to see the candidates and celebrities involved with the campaign. While the focus of the Green Party is on issues and solutions, video provides the necessary image component expected by the American public. The use of such techniques helps to challenge this cultural barrier to third party support.

The *Vote Nader* website employs an interactive map that allows users to click on their state to find local information on volunteering, contacts, and meetings. The map is also color coded to reveal the states in which Nader is on the ballot. The map shows significant gains over ballot restrictions for the Green Party. The map attempts to overcome resource and networking barriers to the Green Party by increasing the potential for geographical proximity between supporters. The map provides an alternative real world relationship to the virtual relationship that the site tries to establish with each individual.

Multimedia is an important element to the understanding and attractiveness of the website. This visual appeal of the site, the use of video, and the interactive map help to break the barriers to third parties by offering different visual and psychological appeals within an organized website. The use of multimedia images and colors differentiates the Green Party from other parties. The use of video increases information dissemination in face of media neglect of third parties. The interactive map is unique because it breaks geographical barriers, while other website options, such as e-mail alerts, increase virtual proximity.

Language

The terminology of the *Vote Nader* website is important when considering the forum or community that is being established. The site must attempt to include a diverse audience while maintaining some consistency in viewpoints. The language within the site reveals the major themes of the Green Party that distinguish it for the major parties and help break the barriers discussed in this analysis. The largely textual format of the issue section of the website suggests language plays a large role in identifying these predominant views.

An important element of this analysis of language is the use of letters and related articles that accompany the issue statements made by the campaign. The issue statements largely restrict criticism of opponents to a discussion of incorrect proposals and unsupported ideas. The letters and supporting articles provide a method for the campaign to criticize other candidates or opposing views without using negative campaigning. The supporting articles allow the Green Party to address the credibility and content of the

views presented by the major parties. The use of letters to other candidates challenges their morality, intelligence, consistency, and record in a seemingly formal manner. In a letter addressed to Joe Lieberman, the language is direct, questioning, and condescending rather than slanderous. However, the use of the letter is biased. The answers to the letter are not printed and the audience is left in doubt about the other candidates' positions. This method is an innovative way of avoiding negative campaigning in a political environment that is tired of personality bashing. The language choice becomes a method of overcoming cultural stigmas while allowing the Green Party to delineate itself from the other major parties in issue presentation.

The use of letters and related articles also has important implications to the overall themes supported by the Nader campaign. The letters sometimes address the audience in a revolutionary capacity, identifying the need to transcend certain political barriers. For example a letter on environmental issues is titled "To Whom the Earth Concerns." Besides applying to almost any potential audience, these types of letters combined with the ones discussed above are reminiscent of pre-revolutionary America. They address issue supporters about the need to change much in the same way letters were used in colonial America to persuade revolutionaries. Further supporting this point is the inclusion of supporting articles like Nader's "Concord Principles," which are also designed in format and language to seem just as revolutionary and American as the Declaration of Independence or the Bill of Rights. The language use in these letters and supporting articles helps to differentiate the Green party from others by transcending the liberal-conservative access. In addition, the mobilization of voters centers on these anti-bureaucratic ideals and the need for change expressed in the revolutionary language.

The Vote Nader website employs the use of other major themes that are significant to the discussion of cultural and structural barriers. The remainder of the language section will look at the ability of language to create dominant thematic statements throughout the website. These statements help identify the Green Party as socially and politically progressive. As discussed below, these thematic statements created through language choice become direct voices against the cultural and political barriers to third parties.

The first major theme is a focus on social and cultural issues of race, gender, and poverty. Although these three issues are allotted their own space within the issue format, they are continually addressed in the discussion of most other issues as well. In addition, the issues of poverty and equal opportunities are highlighted on the home page by large buttons, distinguishing them from other issues in importance. In an analysis of language it becomes clear that the use of specific buttons and themes in the title page is intentional. Nader's policies concerning health, military, economy, drugs, education, and foreign policy revolve around human rights regardless of race, gender, or income level. The stress on cultural themes is reflective of third party attempts to gain voters by encouraging discussion about cultural barriers. This focus delineates the Green Party from other major parties. Language becomes a tool to break cultural barriers that limit campaign issues to economic and foreign policy initiatives. The socially concerned language makes direct appeals for change throughout the site. This language of empowerment and human rights is paralleled to another theme: the disillusionment with the major parties.

Campaign finance reform is another issue given a special button on the home page, distinguishing it from other issues. The Nader campaign uses language to construct a theme of disillusionment with the Democratic Party concerning social issues and a fear of the Republicans in general. The website's discussion of campaign finance reform equates the major parties with corporate criminals. The language of the statements maintains that money contributions often stifle or exclude from the mainstream the issues that really affect people. Both parties are accused of preventing full ballot access of the Green Party. Statements by Nader and LaDuke specifically address their personal disillusionment with the Democratic Party. The Nader campaign becomes equated with a progressive political revolution that focuses on the will of the people. The revolution will either transform the Democratic Party or encourage political reform. The Nader campaign claims to look past the current elections to an ultimate goal of political reform and pledges to remain persistent throughout the years. This persistence and candidate faithfulness in face of traditional structural barriers is key to the success of the Green Party. The language helps to delineate the Green Party from politics as usual. The pervasive theme of campaign and party reform directly addresses the structural barriers faced by the party and uniquely identifies the other major parties as in the wrong.

The ultimate conclusion is direct language that challenges the traditional structural and cultural barriers to third parties. A strong focus on cultural and social issues delineates the Green Party from the major party issues of debt and foreign policy. The emphasis on a progressive political movement differentiates the Green Party campaign from politics as usual and counteracts the delegitimizing techniques of the major parties without using negative campaigning. The combination of these overarching

themes creates value dimensions that appeal to gender, race, and class issues by focusing specifically on them. The Nader campaign transcends the traditional liberal-conservative access by challenging the focus and important issues of the country through direct and consistent thematic language choices. The intent is to create the ideological changes in the audience necessary to overcome traditional political inequities.

Links

The presence of links within a website provides content choices for different audience members. The *Vote Nader* website contains hundreds of links to supporting articles, letters, videos, and news articles that support the issues and overarching themes of the campaign. The site is formatted by a series of interconnected issues, support statements, and letters. For example, a link to the same statement on healthcare is found under both the health and equal rights sections. The Green Party uses the interconnectivity of the site to avoid outside influences. Disregarding a few random new articles, very few of these links take the audience out of the www.votenader.com domain.

The use of links outside the *Vote Nader* website seems to be restricted to certain issues. The issue of gender seems to be the most dominant example that contains numerous outside links. The assumption is that the links to other sites on gender will help to dimensionalize the Nader position through the opinions of members of this group. The *Vote Nader* website has eight outside links to the feminist position by different authors. Interestingly, Nader limits his own discussion of feminism despite his normally thorough and passionate presentation of the issues. Despite these outside links and lack

of issue statement, the content of the *Vote Nader* page still limits outside discussion of the issue. For example, the Nader campaign supports the NOW platform. Instead of providing a link to the NOW website, the *Vote Nader* website links to its own condensed description of the platform. The link adapts the image consistency of the entire site.

The other area where outside links are used is limited to the biographies of the candidates. The Nader biography links to two sites. The first is the Public Citizen, a watchdog group founded by Nader. The second is the Nader Page, a site devoted to the biography and books of Ralph Nader. These two sites offer very little in terms of diversity from the Vote Nader website. The LaDuke biography presents more outside links that are largely directed at her involvement in the Native American community and her reasons for running for office.

The links on the *Vote Nader* website offer few choices for outside opinion. The website limits such links in order to limit the possible interpretation of the Nader campaign message. A large number of links to a broad range of issues if often an attempt to ease the textual anxiety created by different language, multimedia, and format of a website. While the *Vote Nader* website covers numerous issues, the overarching themes and image consistency discussed earlier limit the ultimate conclusions of browsing audience members. The implications are a relatively controlled site that has potential the to break cultural and structural barriers by limiting access to outside views.

Conclusion

This analysis identified the strategies used by the Green Party to overcome structural and cultural barriers to third parties through Internet campaigning. The

discussion of format largely identified the structural barriers of voter mobilization, networking, and resources. The discussion of multimedia revealed techniques to overcome personality politics and the lack of media coverage. Language played a key role in the analysis by identifying the key cultural themes used to transcend the current political system and the creation of overarching themes aimed at gender, race, and class differences. The analysis of links revealed the limited accessibility to outside ideas that further enhances the persuasive goals of the website in overcoming traditional structural and cultural barriers.

The analysis of these strategies reveals the Green Party focus concerning the barriers discussed in the literature review and provides potential suggestions for improvement. The website would be more effective if it incorporated more interactive elements (games, chat rooms, and e-mail groups) to draw audience members in and overcome network barriers. In addition, more sources or outside links would increase the credibility of the opinions and issue statements on the website with little damage to the political campaign statements. Lastly, the language of the website neglects to mention the accomplishments of the party in general or in overcoming specific barriers like ballot access and delegitimizing techniques used by the major parties.

Despite public opinion, the Green Party made significant steps in the 2000 election in overcoming ballot access restrictions, getting counted in every state but three. They increased voter turnout and more accurately defined their message. In light of this study, how do we explain this limited success? Maybe the Internet is not highly recognized as a guide to political information. Perhaps the physical campaign itself failed to gather the support it needed countrywide. What remains clear is that third

parties will continue to struggle to overcome these barriers despite intentional focusing on them. The success of these struggles as addressed in Internet communication relies on an audience. The Green Party should make larger attempts in the future to increase website viewing.

However, even if the website garnered an increased viewing audience, questions remain concerning the effectiveness of campaign language and themes in the seamless nature of the Internet. What format, language, multimedia, and links best address the targeted audience without isolating the larger audience? Research concerning the ability to control persuasive messages in such a user-guided medium would be valuable, as the Internet will undoubtedly play a larger role in third party success in future elections.

Bibliography

Benoit, William L. and Pamela J. Benoit. *"The Virtual Campaign: Presidential Primary Websites in Campaign 2000."* Obtained online: http://acjournal.org/holdings/vol3/Iss3/rogue4/benoit.html

Bibby, John F. Two Parties-Or More? Boulder, Westview Press, 1998.

Buel, John. *"Reinventing Ralph Nader: Back to the Future."* Humanist July/Aug. 2000: 40+

Gillespie, J. David. Politics at the Periphery: Third Parties in Two-Party America. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993.

Isaacson, Carl. *"My Governor Can Whup Your Governor's A. . ."* Obtained online: http://acjournal.org/holdings/vol4/iss1/articles/issacson.htm

Loeb, Eric, and John Mallery. *Overview of the 1992 Presidential Campaign Information System.* Obtained Online: http://www.ai.mti.edu/people/loeb/APSA94/outline.html

Mitra, Ananda. *"Diasporic Web Sites: In-group and Out group Discourse."* Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 1997: 158+

Peterson, Robert A. *"Why a third party cannot succeed."* Human Events Dec. 1995: 16.

Reary, Matthew M., and David D. Perlmutter. *Presidential Websites as Sources of Information.* Obtained Online: http://www.cios.org/getfile\Reavy_V7N39

Rheingold, Howard. The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1993.

Riessman, Frank. *"Third party: Possibilities and problems."* Social Policy Winter 1994: 40+

Rosenstone, Steven J., Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus, Eds. Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996.

Sanders, Bernie. *"Third & Goal."* Nation November 1995: 526+.